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C O N F I D E N T I A L COLOMBO 001056

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PGOV PTER CE LTTE

SUBJECT: FACTIONS STILL MONK(EY)ING AROUND WITH JOINT MECHANISM

REF: A. COLOMBO 1044

B. COLOMBO 01052

Classified By: CDA J. ENTWISTLE FOR REASONS 1.4(b) and (d)

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EVENTS OF JUNE 13-14  
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¶1. (U) On June 13 the President launched a campaign to garner public support for the proposed joint mechanism (JM) to distribute tsunami aid (Reftel A). The President has asked all the Members of Parliament in her coalition to raise awareness about the JM in their constituencies. She has requested that the Secretariat's Media Unit coordinate and assist in these efforts. Print ads in favor of the JM in both English and Sinhala have already appeared.

¶2. (U) Despite these efforts, the President continues to face strong opposition. On June 14 the Janatha Vimukthi Peremuna (JVP), the Sinhalese nationalist coalition partner, organized a protest march that culminated in a rally at the Town Hall. As of COB June 14, it remained peaceful. Monks from the National Bhikku Front (NBF) and members of the National Assembly of Organizations against the Joint Mechanism held a concurrent protest in Dehiwela, 10km south of Colombo. The NBF also sent representatives to meet with two Mahanayakes, or chief Buddhist prelates, in a bid to have the Mahanayakes persuade the President not to sign the JM. As an alternative, they suggested that the President revisit a proposal the JVP submitted on May 19 which excluded the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) from involvement in determining the disbursement of tsunami aid. (Comment. It is extremely unlikely that the JVP proposal will be revived at this late date. End comment.) On June 15, JVP-affiliated trade unions are slated to rally in protest in Colombo also.

¶3. (U) In her efforts to push forward with the JM, the President met Opposition Leader and former Prime Minister Ranil Wickremsinghe June 13. According to press reports, during their brief discussion, Wickremsinghe offered qualified support for the concept of a JM. However, he reiterated that his party could not pledge full support until he and other party leaders had a copy of the JM draft proposal. He also asserted once again that the President should have made the draft of the JM available two months ago.

¶4. (SBU) Also on June 13, Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapakse met with the JVP. According to press reports, he asked them to engage with other parties in the Government's alliance on the JM issue. The JVP responded that since the terms of the JM have already been decided, it is futile to hold discussions now. The Prime Minister also requested that the JVP postpone its deadline for withdrawing from the government from June 16 to June 30 (Reftel), a request the JVP refused.

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WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?  
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¶5. (C) Sources within the Presidential Secretariat told pol FSN that if the JVP resigns from the Government, it is likely the President will "prorogue" Parliament, currently set to reconvene on June 22. The prorogue is a uniquely Presidential authority granted in Article 70 of the Constitution. If the President invokes this authority, Parliament could remain suspended for as long as two months. Within that time, the President can either dissolve Parliament and call for elections, or negotiate with MPs to gather majority support for the JM.  
ENTWISTLE